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Censorship and Fahrenheit 451

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High Impact Fellows Project Overview

Project Title: Censorship and *Fahrenheit 451*

Course: English (Freshmen Academy)

Grade Level: 9th Grade

Team Members:

Student: Michelle Stinson

High School Teacher: Dr. Susan Miles

Wofford Faculty: Dr. Natalie Grinnell

Brief Description:

The goal of this project was to apply the censorship found in *Fahrenheit 451* to other situations present in different areas of “the real world”. The students, after doing so, would then create a video of images and their voice, discussing themes of Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and how it’s used in other areas outside of the book. The purpose is to have students use analysis in literature and applying it in different areas as well as to do so in a different way other than through writing. By using the video software, they are changing the way that traditional classroom settings are used.

Materials:

Microphone/headset: \$6

WeVideo software: Free

Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*: \$10 (roughly on Amazon)

Outcomes and Course Planning

There are three goals for this short workshop:

1. Identify three goals for your course
2. Identify assignments you give and their connection to those goals
3. Discuss ways to assess student progress

Part I. Defining Course Writing Goals

Below, write down three things that you would like your students to be able to do in their writing when they leave your course.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Part II. Sketching How to Get There

Below, list an assignment that you give students at each time during the semester. Identify which of the goals above, if any, are related to those assignments.

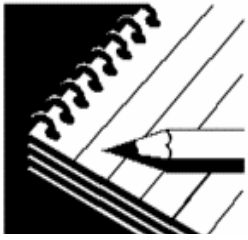
First Half of Semester	Midterm	Final

Questions for Discussion

1. Do the assignments and goals align?
2. Do these assignments ask students to apply prior knowledge gained in the course to the next assignment? How do you know this?
3. What happens between the assignments that connect the goals to the work?

Part III. Assessing progress

What ways do you (or could you) assess student progress?



RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

Did you know that, according to research, students rarely read your comments on the final draft of a paper? Instead, they look only for the grade. Why go to all that work? Is there a better way? There is indeed.

A helpful overview of best practices by SUNY Cortland cites a number of studies showing that commenting on students' early drafts is the most effective way to get their attention (Kennedy). When students attend to your comments, they improve their writing as well as their understanding of your field. In other words, by responding to students' writing in draft stages, you can intervene in their critical thinking and writing processes.

Often, in our zeal to highlight all the ways a paper could be or should be improved, we neglect the value of positive reinforcement. Yet, John Bean reminds us of our own anxieties when we ask a colleague to comment on our drafts and then adds that "we sometimes forget these feelings when we comment on students' papers" (p.239). Paul Diederich adds, "Noticing and praising whatever a student does well improves writing more than any kind or amount of correction of what he does badly. . ." (qtd. in Daiker, p.105).

The following suggestions may help you respond more efficiently and more positively to your students' writing.

- As part of your written assignment sheet, state the criteria upon which the writing will be evaluated. This saves you from commenting on *everything* and gets students to focus on what is most *important*.
- Require and respond to early drafts. Students pay the most attention to comments on early drafts. Students can then use your comments while revising. You will write comments to help students write well, rather than to justify a grade. In other words, you will be responding to the contents of the paper rather than pointing out and correcting errors.
- Try reading the whole set of papers quickly *before* you write any comments. You need to benchmark the range of performance in the class. Your comments are likely to be more fair and on target. You can also make a list of important comments for the whole class, which saves the effort of writing the same comment repeatedly to individuals. You will also discover if your assignment was not clear.
- Students will interpret your comments as reflecting your priorities. Comment first on *global* issues, including responsiveness to task, handling of key issues, logic of the argument, depth and complexity of support, or helpful organization. If most of your comments are about lower-order issues, such as spelling or commas, then those are the issues that students will address. If you just sit down and start marking a paper, you will notice and mark little things. You need to train yourself to work at the global level.
- If there are serious grammar or style issues, make one or two comments such as "*Try combining some of your short sentences into more complex patterns. Attached is a sheet that provides several examples of what I mean.*" or "*Your misuse of semicolons and commas seriously weakens your paper. Check your handbook or go to the Writing Center to learn how to solve the problems.*"
- Make positive, specific comments. These can range from "*You are adding a lot of informative details about the change in the birthrate*" to "*This paragraph is very persuasive because you first state your claim and then back it up with examples*" to "*Your helpful introduction prepares the reader for your key arguments*" to "*I like the way you carefully define the foreign trade dilemma.*" Acknowledge writing that is clear or research that shows extra effort and thought.
- Write constructive comments that students can act upon, such as "*Add some data or a chart here to support your point*" or "*Reread the section on jury selection. I think you will see that your position is not clear on the issue of over- representation of minority jurors*" or "*This point about stem cell*"



research could be a very powerful closing to your paper” or “This point is interesting, but it doesn’t tie in with your point about family structure—can you find a way to make it connect?” Such comments help students understand a problem with their writing while helping them develop a critical approach that can be used in later writing assignments. Such comments help students think through writing problems without providing answers or corrections.

- Comment on the draft as a member of the student’s intended audience—as a reader, not as a critic. Comments such as the following can help the student see the importance of choosing an audience and writing to it: *“I expected statistics on divorce rates here”* or *“Are you giving too much basic information for your technically savvy audience?”* or *“I like the way you surprised me at the closing with a counter-intuitive position.”*
- Write legibly. If students can’t read your comments, they can’t make changes.
- Don’t shut down the student with too many comments. When you limit both the length and the frequency of your comments, students know they—not you—are in charge of the paper. More importantly, too many comments can overwhelm students or encourage them to make changes only where you have commented.
- Use open-ended questions to stimulate critical thinking: *“Could you be more specific concerning the titration design?”* *“I want to believe you. Do you have more support for the potential for developing cross resistance?”* *“Have you considered looking at this issue from a feminist point of view?”* *“I got confused here. Could you clarify your argument about change in character with evidence from the novel?”* *“Have you thought about the way Carl Sagan approached this?”*
- Check yourself for vague comments such as *“This is confusing,”* *“Good,”* or *“You are off track here.”*
- Responding to writing doesn’t always mean responding in writing; set aside a time, if possible, to hold brief (5 to 10 minutes) conferences with students who want help. The conference might be when they are first planning a paper, while the class meets in a computer lab to work on drafts, when they have a very rough first draft, or after you have commented upon a draft. A few minutes in conference can make a big difference.

USEFUL SOURCES:

Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Daiker, Donald. “Learning to Praise,” *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research*. Ed. Chris M. Anson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989. 103-113.

Kennedy, Mary L. *The Online Manual for Writing Across the Curriculum*. SUNY Cortland. 4 Oct. 2002. 4 Feb. 2004. <http://www.cortland.edu/english/wac/index.html>

Useful websites:

<http://cstw.ohio-state.edu/wac/resources/handouts/respondingfaq.htm>

<http://cstw.ohio-state.edu/wac/resources/handouts/techniquesforresponding.htm>

<http://web.usf.edu/~lc/wac/respond.html>



Revising Your Paper

This handout should help guide you in the revision of your papers. I am providing it to aid you in re-visioning your texts as opposed to just editing them. They may also be very helpful as ways to peer review your work. They give readers a way to read your paper. For example, asking someone to reverse outline your paper can really help her help you see how your paper is organized. There are very few papers that move between drafts beyond surface ideas, and I am hoping this will help you. I have arranged in under headings for clarity.

Reverse Outlining

I do not believe you can begin a paper with an outline, but outlining becomes important in the revision process. This strategy is one of the easiest to perform. Once you have finished your draft, go back and outline what you have. That is, look at your introduction and find your thesis. Write it down somewhere. Reread your first paragraph and find the sentence or sentences that sum up the claim you are making. Write it down. Complete this process with each of your paragraphs. If, during this process, you find that you write a sentence like, "This paragraph is about the "Declaration of Independence," you do not have a claim.

What happens if you cannot find the sentence that your paragraph is about? This problem has to be rectified.

Once you have completed this process, and you have all the sentences there. Are they related? Beyond relating, do they progress towards making a point? Are they smaller claims of your larger topic?

This process should help you get settled on some claims to frame each of your paragraphs/sections.

Claims/Evidence/Analysis and the Highlighter Exercise

Another way to look at the paragraphs of your paper is to think about the three levels of presentation. I will define each for you here.

Claims—like the exercise above, each section of your paper should be organized by a given claim. That is, you should be telling your readers your points very clearly in the form of claims. These are not statements of summary and they should be debatable. Generally speaking these come early in paragraphs or as framing sentences for sections of your paper.

Evidence—claims must be supported by evidence. Phrases like “for example,” “for instance,” “in some cases,” etc., show your readers that you are presenting evidence. Evidence comes in the form of quotes, paraphrases and summary. Citations follow evidence.

Analysis—evidence must be connected to your claims via analysis. Analysis should be the bulk of your writing. Here is where you show your audience your thinking and your ability to apply it to your topic.

A good strategy for dividing claims/evidence/analysis comes in the form of the highlight exercise. In this exercise you take three different highlighters/markers and assign a color to each of the concepts. For example, take a yellow highlighter and highlight all the claims you make. Then, follow this for both evidence and analysis. Do not highlight anything that does not function as a claim, evidence or analysis. This exercise allows you to visually see what work you have done. Again, the bulk of the work should fall under the category of analysis.

Mining your Conclusion

Most of the time when you finish a first draft you have done little more than narrate an argument. That is, you are telling your readers a lot, but you have not yet gotten yourself around a set of claims. Sometimes these claims show up in your conclusion. It’s amazing that when you begin to write a conclusion you often sum up your best claims, and sometimes these claims are not even really in the paper at all.

Touching Your Paper

This strategy is best used when you think you are finished. You take your draft and touch each of the following and answer the question. If you can’t answer the question then do not move on until you have reconciled that issue.

1. thesis. Find it. Is it something that makes you take a stance? Can someone disagree with you or offer another insight?
2. “this.” Every time you see this word a noun should follow it. There are absolutely no exceptions.
3. Quotes. Are they introduced? Do you cite them? Are they preceded by a claim? Are they marked by some phrase? Are they followed by analysis?
4. Topic sentences. Are your paragraphs framed by an idea that is your own? That is, do that do more than summarize a work?
5. Conclusion. Does it tell you something that you could not have known without reading your paper?

Curriculum Units

This project assessed the students' ability to apply a subject from one topic (censorship in *Fahrenheit 451* to other areas (historic/present-day). The way in which the student analyzes censorship is critical to assessing the way in which students come up with an idea and verify it with evidence.

Materials

[Amazon](#)

[WeVideo Software](#)

Costs

The project, as a whole, was cost efficient because the software was a free online program and the headsets that the students used were already owned by the school. The headsets average at around \$6 per headset.

Resources

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. New York. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1951. Print.

[WeVideo Software](#)

Classroom Assessment

(From Dr. S. Miles' personal assessment): "The video itself revealed higher level thinking (Bloom's New Taxonomy), such as applying the principles of censorship to other scenarios; analyzing those scenarios, the inherent principles, and motivations for censorship; creating the project according to the rubric; evaluating the scenarios researched in light of justice/injustice; and evaluating their projects according to the rubric.

Summative: This project was a summative assessment on a sci-fi unit on Fahrenheit 451, which dealt with the dangers of technological advancements as well as censorship.

Formative: During the creation of the project, the formative assessment was the teacher's observation of and feedback on the students' understanding as they created the project.

Authentic: The video project itself was very definitely an authentic assessment designed according to the style of expose' journalism."

[9] They were subjects of American sovereignty.

[10] In this sense, Jackson's policy of Indian removal was in line with the best wishes of the people that the ideals of the American Revolution were set aside for, the American citizens who wished for more fertile lands and safe borders.

[11] Jackson was indeed providing for the citizens that he believed the Declaration of Independence encompassed.

CHAPTER 8

Using Evidence to Build a Paper: 10 on 1 versus 1 on 10

IN THIS CHAPTER WE ARGUE for the importance of saying more about less. The phrase we use for this idea is 10 on 1. The concept of 10 on 1 was introduced in Chapter 3, A Toolkit of Analytical Methods, as a variant of Notice and Focus, an observation strategy. In this chapter, 10 on 1 is used to talk about essay structure as well as the analysis of selected data.

The phrase 10 on 1 stands for the principle that it is better to make ten observations or points about a single representative issue or example (10 on 1) than to make the same basic point about ten related issues or examples (1 on 10). Doing 10 on 1 teaches writers to narrow their focus and then analyze in depth, drawing out as much meaning as possible from their best examples.

The chapter opens with a critique of the ubiquitous high school format known as five-paragraph form, an organizational scheme that actively blocks sustained reflection about the meaning of evidence. The chapter then goes on to demonstrate the advantages of 10 on 1 as an alternative scheme both for writing and revising papers.

DEVELOPING A THESIS IS MORE THAN REPEATING AN IDEA (1 ON 10)

When the time comes to compose a formal paper with a thesis, it is very common for writers to abandon the wealth of data and ideas they have accumulated in the exploratory writing stage, panic, and revert to old habits: "Now I better have my one idea and be able to prove to everybody that I'm right." Out goes careful attention to detail. Out goes any evidence that doesn't fit. Instead of analysis, they substitute the kind of paper we call a *demonstration*. That is, they cite evidence to prove that a generalization is generally true. The problem with the demonstration lies with its too-limited notions of what a thesis and evidence can do in a piece of analytical thinking.

A paper produced by repeating a single unchanging idea generally follows the form we call 1 on 10: the writer makes a single and usually very general claim ("History repeats itself," "Exercise is good for you," etc.) and then proceeds to affix it to ten examples. (See Figure 8.1.) A writer who reasserts the same idea about each example is going to produce a list, not a piece of developed thinking. By contrast,

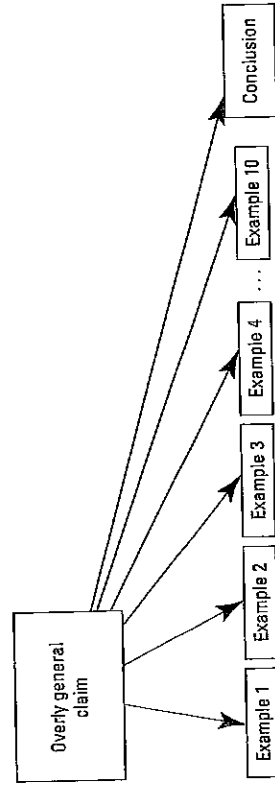


FIGURE 8.1
Doing 1 on 10. The horizontal pattern of 1 on 10 (in which 10 stands arbitrarily for any number of examples) repeatedly makes the same point about every example. Its analysis of evidence is superficial.

in nearly all good writing the thesis evolves by gaining in complexity and, thus, in accuracy as the paper progresses.

The 1 on 10 demonstration results from a mistaken assumption about the function of evidence, that it exists only to demonstrate the validity of (corroborate) a claim. Beyond corroborating claims, evidence should serve to test, develop, and evolve the thesis. This is one of the most important points of this chapter.

Admittedly, demonstrations have their place—short speeches, for example, in situations in which the audience has to follow a chain of thought in spite of interference from noise or other distractions. And it's also true that when a writer is trying to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to make a claim, it is useful to collect a group of related examples before focusing on the most interesting or revealing ones. If, for example, you were writing about the failure of faith in the biblical book of Exodus, you would do well to chart repeated instances of its failure to substantiate that it is a recurrent feature. But to get beyond this general demonstration, you would need to look more closely at a representative instance.

Where do writers get the idea that a thesis should be static? In most cases they learned it early in their writing careers as part of a stubbornly inflexible organizational scheme known as five-paragraph form.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH FIVE-PARAGRAPH FORM?

Perhaps the best introduction to what's wrong with five-paragraph form can be found in Greek mythology. On his way to Athens, the hero Theseus encounters a particularly surly host, Procrustes, who offers wayfarers a bed for the night but with a catch. If they do not fit his bed exactly, he either stretches them or lops off their extremities until they do. This story has given us the word *procrustean*, which the dictionary defines as "tending to produce conformity by violent or arbitrary means." Five-paragraph form is a procrustean formula that most students learn in high school. Although it has the advantage of providing a mechanical format that gives virtually any subject the

appearance of order, it usually lops off a writer's ideas before they have the chance to form, or it stretches a single idea to the breaking point.

A complex idea is one that has many sides. To treat such ideas intelligently, writers need a form that does not require them to cut off all of those sides except the one that most easily fits the bed. Most of you will find the basic five-paragraph form familiar:

1. An introduction that ends with a thesis listing three points (the so-called tripartite thesis)
2. Three body paragraphs, each supporting one of the three points
3. A conclusion beginning "Thus, we see" or "In conclusion" that essentially repeats the thesis statement as it was in paragraph one.

Here is an example in outline form:

Introduction: The food in the school cafeteria is bad. It lacks variety, it's unhealthy, and it is always overcooked. In this essay I will discuss these three characteristics.

Paragraph 2: The first reason cafeteria food is bad is that there is no variety. (Plus one or two examples—no salad bar, mostly fried food, etc.)

Paragraph 3: Another reason cafeteria food is bad is that it is not healthy. (Plus a few reasons—high cholesterol, too many hot dogs, too much sugar, etc.)

Paragraph 4: In addition, the food is always overcooked. (Plus some examples—the vegetables are mushy, the mystery meat is tough to recognize, etc.)

Conclusion: Thus, we see . . . (Plus a restatement of the introductory paragraph.)

Most high school students write dozens of themes using this basic formula. They are taught to use five-paragraph form because it seems to provide the greatest good—a certain minimal clarity—for the greatest number of students. But the form does not promote logically tight and thoughtful writing. It is a meat grinder that can turn any content into sausages.

The two major problems it typically creates are easy to see.

1. The introduction reduces the remainder of the essay to *redundancy*. The first paragraph tells readers, in an overly general and list-like way, what they're going to hear; the succeeding three paragraphs tell the readers the same thing again in more detail, carrying the overly general main idea along inertly; and the conclusion repeats what the readers have just been told (twice). The first cause of all this redundancy lies with the thesis. As in the preceding example, the thesis (cafeteria food is bad) is too broad—an unqualified and obvious generalization—and substitutes a simple list of predictable points for a complex statement of idea.
2. The form arbitrarily divides content: why are there three points (or examples or reasons) instead of five or one? A quick look at the three categories in our example reveals how arbitrarily the form has divided the subject. Isn't overcooked food unhealthy? Isn't a lack of variety also conceivably unhealthy? The format invites writers to list rather than analyze, to plug supporting examples into categories without examining them or how they are related. Five-paragraph form,

as is evident in our sample's transitions ("first," "second," and "in addition"), counts things off but doesn't make logical connections. At its worst, the form prompts the writer to simply append evidence to generalizations without saying anything about it.

The subject, on the other hand, is not as unpromising as the format makes it appear. It could easily be redirected along a more productive pathway. (If the food is bad, what are the underlying causes of the problem? Are students getting what they ask for? Is the problem one of cost? Is the faculty cafeteria better? Why or why not?)

Now let's look briefly at the introductory paragraph from a student's essay on a more academic subject. Here we can see a remarkable feature of five-paragraph form—its capacity to produce the same kind of say-nothing prose on almost any subject.

Throughout the film *The Tempest*, a version of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, there were a total of nine characters. These characters were Calibano, Alonso, Antonio, Aretha, Freddy, the doctor, and Dolores. Each character in the film represented a person in Shakespeare's play, but there were four people who were greatly similar to those in Shakespeare, and who played a role in symbolizing aspects of forgiveness, love, and power.

The final sentence of the paragraph reveals the writer's addiction to five-paragraph form. It signals that the writer will proceed in a purely mechanical and superficial way, producing a paragraph on forgiveness, a paragraph on love, a paragraph on power, and a conclusion stating again that the film's characters resemble Shakespeare's in these three aspects. The writer is so busy demonstrating that the characters are concerned with forgiveness, love, and power that he or she misses the opportunity to analyze the significance of his or her own observations. Instead, readers are drawn wearily to a conclusion; they get no place except back where they began. Furthermore, the demonstration mode prevents the writer from analyzing connections among the categories. The writer might consider, for example, how the play and the film differ in resolving the conflict between power and forgiveness (focusing on difference within similarity), and to what extent the film and the play agree about which is the most important of the three aspects (focusing on similarity despite difference).

These more analytical approaches lie concealed in the writer's introduction, but they are never discovered because the five-paragraph form militates against sustained analytical thinking. Its division of the subject into parts, which is only one part of analysis, has become an end unto itself. The procrustean formula insists upon a tripartite list in which each of the three parts is separate, equal, and above all, inert.

Here are two quick checks for whether a paper of yours has closed down your thinking through a scheme such as five-paragraph form:

1. Look at the *paragraph openings*. If these read like a list, each beginning with an additive transition like "another" followed by a more or less exact repetition of your central point (another example is . . . , yet another example is . . .), you should suspect that you are not adequately developing your ideas.
2. Compare the wording in the last statement of the paper's thesis (in the conclusion) with the first statement of it in the introduction. If the wording at these

two locations is virtually the same, you know that your thesis has not responded adequately to your evidence.

ANALYZING EVIDENCE IN DEPTH: 10 ON 1

The practice called 10 on 1 focuses analysis on a representative example. In doing 10 on 1 you are taking one part of the whole, putting it under a microscope, and then generalizing about the whole on the basis of analyzing a single part.

- The phrase 10 on 1 means ten observations and implications about one representative piece of evidence (10 is an arbitrary number meaning many.)
- The phrase 1 on 10 means one general point attached to 10 pieces of evidence.

As a guideline, 10 on 1 leads you to draw out as much meaning as possible from your best example—a case of narrowing the focus and then analyzing in depth. (See Figure 8.2.) Eventually you will move from this key example to others that usefully extend and qualify your point, but first you need to let analysis of your representative example produce more thinking.

You can use 10 on 1 to accomplish various ends: (1) to locate the range of possible meanings your evidence suggests, (2) to make you less inclined to cling to your

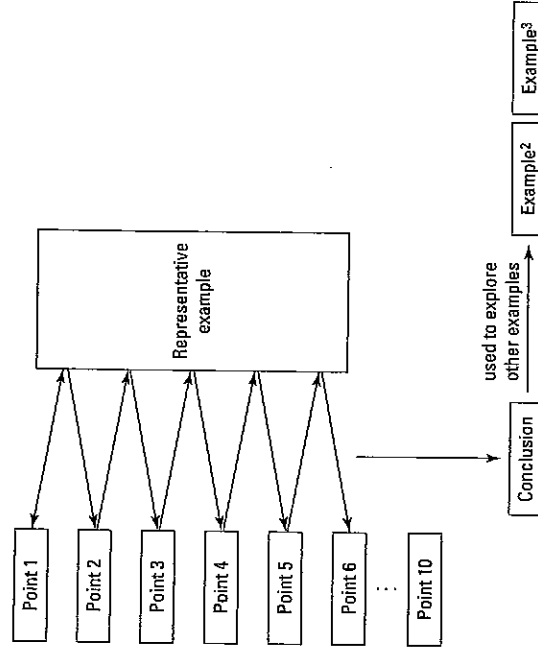


FIGURE 8.2

Doing 10 on 1. The pattern of 10 on 1 (in which 10 stands arbitrarily for any number of points) successively develops a series of points about a single representative example. Its analysis of evidence is in depth.

first claim, (3) to open the way for you to discover the complexity of your subject, and (4) to slow down the rush to generalization and thus help to ensure that when you arrive at a working thesis, it will be more specific and better able to account for your evidence.

Demonstrating the Representativeness of Your Example

Focusing on your single best example has the advantage of economy, cutting to the heart of the subject, but it runs the risk that the example you select might not in fact be representative. Thus, to be safe, you need to demonstrate its representativeness overtly. This means showing that your example is part of a larger pattern of similar evidence and not just an isolated instance. To establish that pattern it is useful to do 1 on 10—locating ten examples that share a trait—as a preliminary step, and then select one of these for in-depth analysis.

In terms of logic, the problem of generalizing from too little and unrepresentative evidence is known as an unwarranted inductive leap. The writer leaps from one or two instances to a broad claim about an entire class or category. Just because you see an economics professor and a biology professor wearing corduroy jackets, for example, you would not want to leap to the conclusion that all professors wear corduroy jackets. Most of the time, unwarranted leaps result from making too large a claim and avoiding examples that might contradict it.

10 on 1 and Disciplinary Conventions

In some cases, the conventions of a discipline appear to discourage doing 10 on 1. The social sciences in particular tend to require a larger set of analogous examples to prove a hypothesis. Especially in certain kinds of research, the focus of inquiry rests on discerning broad statistical trends over a wide range of evidence. But some trends deserve more attention than others, and some statistics similarly merit more interpretation than others. The best writers learn to choose examples carefully—each one for a reason—and to concentrate on developing the most revealing ones in depth.

For instance, proving that tax laws are prejudiced in particularly subtle ways against unmarried people might require a number of analogous cases along with a statistical summary of the evidence. But even with a subject such as this, you could still concentrate on some examples more than others. Rather than moving through each example as a separate case, you could use your analyses of these primary examples as lenses for investigating other evidence.

PAN, TRACK, AND ZOOM: USING 10 ON 1 TO BUILD A PAPER

How can 10 on 1 generate the form of a paper? The language of filmmaking offers a useful way for understanding the different ways that a writer can focus evidence. The writer, like the director of a film, controls the focus through different kinds of shots.

The pan.—The camera pivots around a stable axis, giving the viewer the big picture. Using a pan, we see everything from a distance. Pans provide a context, some

larger pattern, the “forest” within which the writer can also examine particular “trees.” Pans establish the representativeness of the example the writer later examines in more detail, showing that it is not an isolated instance.

The track.—The camera no longer stays in one place but follows some sequence of action. For example, whereas a pan might survey a room full of guests at a cocktail party, a track would pick up a particular guest and follow along as she walks across the room, picks up a photograph, proceeds through the door, and throws the photo in a trash can. Analogously, a writer tracks by moving in on selected pieces of the larger picture and following them to make telling connections among them.

The zoom.—The camera moves in even closer on a selected piece of the scene, allowing us to notice more of its details. For example, a zoom might focus in on the woman’s hand as she crumples the photograph she’s about to throw away or on her face as she slams the lid on the trash can. A writer zooms in by giving us more detail on a particular part of his or her evidence and making the details say more. The zoom is the shot that enables you to do 10 on 1.

In a short paper (three to five pages), you might devote as much as 90 percent of your writing to exploring what one example (the 1—your zoom) reveals about the larger subject. Even in a paper that uses several examples, however, as much as 50 percent might still be devoted to analysis of and generalization from a single case. The remaining portion of the paper would make connections with other examples, testing and applying the ideas you arrived at from your single case. In-depth analysis of your best example thus creates a center from which you can move in two directions: (1) toward generalizations about the larger subject and (2) toward other examples, using your primary example as a tool of exploration.

This model, applicable across a wide variety of writing situations, can be reduced to a series of steps:

1. Use The Method or Notice and Focus to find a revealing pattern or tendency in your evidence. (See Chapter 3.)
2. Select a representative example.
3. Do 10 on 1 to produce an in-depth analysis of your example.
4. Test your results in similar cases.

Doing 10 on 1: A Brief Example (Tiananmen Square)

Note how the writer of the following discussion of the people’s revolt in China in 1989 sets up his analysis. He first explains how his chosen example—a single photograph (shown in Figure 8.3) from the media coverage of the event—illuminates his larger subject. The image is of a Chinese man in a white shirt who temporarily halted a line of tanks on their way to quell a demonstration in Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

The tank image provided a miniature, simplified version of a larger, more complex revolution. The conflict between man and tank embodied the same tension found in the conflict between student demonstrators and the Peoples’ Army. The man in the white shirt, like the students, displayed courage, defiance, and rebellious individuality in the face of power. Initially, the

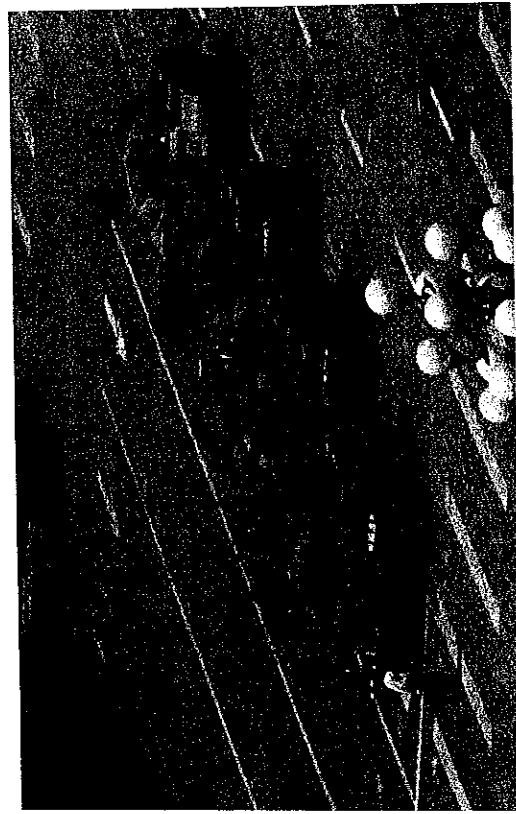


FIGURE 8.3
Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 1989

peaceful revolution succeeded: the state allowed the students to protest; likewise, the tank spared the man's life. Empowered, the students' demands for democracy grew louder. Likewise, the man boldly jumped onto the tank and addressed the soldiers. The state's formerly unshakable dominance appeared weak next to the strength of the individual. However, the state asserted its power: the Peoples' Army marched into the square, and the tanks roared past the man into Beijing.

The image appeals to American ideology. The man in the white shirt personifies the strength of the American individual. His rugged courage draws on contemporary heroes such as Rambo. His defiant gestures resemble the demonstrations of Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers. American history predisposes us to identify strongly with the Chinese demonstrators: we have rebelled against the establishment, we have fought for freedom and democracy, and we have defended the rights of the individual. For example, *The New York Times* reported that President George [H. W.] Bush watched the tank incident on television and said, "I'm convinced that the forces of democracy are going to overcome these unfortunate events in Tiananmen Square." Bush represents the popular American perspective of the Chinese rebellion; we support the student demonstrators.

This analysis is a striking example of doing 10 on 1. In the first paragraph, the writer constructs a detailed analogy between the particular image and the larger subject of which it was a part. The analogy allows the writer not just to describe but also to interpret the event. In the second paragraph, he develops his focus on the image as an image, a photographic representation tailor-made to appeal to American viewing audiences. Rather than generalizing about why Americans might find the image appealing, he establishes a number of explicit connections (does 10 on 1) between the details of the image and typical American heroes. By drawing out the implications

of particular details, he manages to say more about the significance of the American response to the demonstrations in China than a broader survey of those events would have allowed.

Try this 8.1: Doing 10 on 1 with Newspaper Visuals

Search out photographs in the newspaper and do 10 on 1. Or alternatively, spend some time doing 10 on 1 on a comic strip. What perspectives emerge once you have restricted the focus? List details, but also list multiple implications. Remember to ask not just What do I notice? but What else do I notice? And not just What does it imply? but What else might it imply?

Try this 8.2: Doing 10 on 1 with a Reading

Take a piece of reading—a representative example—from something you are studying and do 10 on 1. The key to doing 10 on 1 successfully is to slow down the rush to conclusions so that you can allow yourself to notice more about the evidence and make the details speak. The more observations you assemble about your data before settling on your main idea, the better that idea is likely to be. Remember that a single, well-developed paragraph from something you are reading can be enough to practice on, especially because you are working on saying more about less rather than less about more.

CONVERTING 1 ON 10 INTO 10 ON 1: A STUDENT PAPER (FLOOD STORIES)

The following student paper, about the recurrence of flood stories in religious texts and myth, shows what happens when a writer falls into doing 1 on 10. That is, rather than zooming in on representative examples to test and refine his ideas, he attaches the same underdeveloped point to each of his examples. Typical of the 1-on-10 pattern, the flood paper views everything from the same relatively unrevealing distance.

In the essay that follows, we have used boldface to track the "one" point—the as-yet-underdeveloped thesis idea—that the writer has attached to each of his examples (1 on 10). Brackets and ellipses [...] indicate where we have abridged the essay.

Flood Stories

[1] The role of people, as reflected in Genesis, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, is solely to please the gods. Men, as the gods' subordinates, exist to do right in the gods' eyes and make them feel more like gods; for without men, whom could the gods be gods of? [...]

[2] In Genesis, for example, God created humans in his own image or likeness, and when they displeased Him, He destroyed them. If God could see wickedness in his creations, perhaps it was like seeing wickedness in himself. Further, the idea of having evidence of God being able to create an imperfect, "wicked" race of humans may have been a point God wasn't willing to deal with: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth and it grieved

him to his heart." It seems as though God had become unhappy with his creations so they were to be destroyed. Like a toy a child no longer has use for, humankind was to be wasted.

[3] Similarly, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, God made humanity and "fashioned it into the image of the all-governing gods." Again here, humans were made in the gods' image to serve as an everlasting monument of their glorification, to honor them and do good by them. In other words, humans spent less time making the gods happy and therefore made them unhappy. Some men even questioned the reality of the gods' existence and the strength of their power. Lycon, for example, had a driving tendency to try to belittle the gods and make them look like fools. The gods were very displeased with this trend, and now the entire race had to be destroyed. A flood would be sent to wipe out the race of men. [The writer then summarizes several examples in which the wicked are destroyed and a few upstanding citizens are preserved and arrives at the following conclusion.] Thus, the justification of yet another flood to appease the gods' egos.

[4] Further evidence of humans as being a mere whim of the gods to make them happy lies in the flood story in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It is obvious the gods weren't concerned with humankind, but rather with their own comfort. As the story goes, Enlil, the god of earth, wind, and air, couldn't bear the noise humans were making while he tried to sleep, so he gathered all the gods together, and thus they jointly decided to get rid of their grief of having all the humans around by destroying them. Ea [the god of wisdom], however, warned one man (Utnapishtim) of the flood to come. He told him to build a boat for himself and his wife and for the "seeds of all living creatures." [- . .]

[5] Enlil later repented the harshness of his actions, deified Utnapishtim and his wife and then had the two live far away "on the distance of the rivers' mouths." It possibly could have been belittling to have Utnapishtim and his wife speaking to the new race of humans in terms of how rash and mindlessly the gods were capable of acting, so he immortalized them and had them live far out of the reach of human ears—"the secret of the gods."

[6] It seems that the main objective of the gods was to remain gods; for that is what made them happy. And humanity's role, then, was as the gods' stepping-stone to their happiness. [- . .] Witnessing the fall of humankind, for the gods, was like witnessing imperfection in themselves, and thus their fall; anything causing these feelings didn't do the gods any good and therefore could be terminated without a second thought. It was the job of human beings to make the gods happy, and upon failure at this task, they could be "fired" (death), only to be replaced later—it wasn't a position which the gods could hold vacant for long. Thus were the great flood stories.

The essay starts with a pan on the "big picture." Panning on all three stories has allowed the writer to discover similarities among his blocks of evidence and to demonstrate that the examples he has chosen are representative of his generalization—his claim—that in all three flood stories men exist "solely to please the gods." The writer

then constructs a series of tracks, summaries of each of the three stories that isolate some interesting parallels for readers to ponder. The problem is that, rather than allowing his tracks to set up zooms, the writer returns again and again to versions of his original pan. The result is a 1-on-10 paper in which the writer sees, in effect, only what he wants to see: opportunities to repeatedly match the evidence to his one governing claim.

What's wrong, one might ask, with showing how the evidence fits the claim? Isn't this what writers are supposed to do? The answer is that writers do want to use evidence to show that their claims have validity, but not in so general and redundant a way. As the final sentence of the essay demonstrates ("Thus were the great flood stories"), the writer never really arrives at a conclusion. To develop his central claim, the writer needs to devote much less space to repeating that claim, and more to actually looking at key pieces of evidence, zooming in on significant variations within the general pattern.

In his second paragraph, for example, the writer makes a claim about the God of Genesis that overlooks significant evidence. The claim is as follows: "God had become unhappy with his creations so they were to be destroyed. Like a toy a child no longer has use for, humankind was to be wasted." It is here that the writer allows the 1-on-10 pattern to rush his thinking and distract him from his evidence. The depiction of God as one who treats humans like toys may accurately describe Enlil, the god in *Gilgamesh* who, as we are later told, decides to get rid of humans because they make too much noise. But it does not so easily fit the God of Genesis, about whom the writer has just told us that "the wickedness of man . . . grieved him to his heart." Doesn't the grief that this evidence mentions suggest that God's decision to flood the earth was possibly ethical rather than childishly selfish and rash? And the statement from Genesis that "every imagination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually" would seem to indicate that humans were not simply victims of divine prerogative, but rather that they deserved punishment.

The writer doesn't consider these other possible interpretations because his reliance on pans—the general pattern—has predisposed him to see his evidence only as another sign of the gods' egotism, their desire to remain happy at any cost. Pressed by the desire to match examples to his one governing idea, the writer is not allowing himself to really examine his evidence. Instead, he has attempted to squeeze that evidence into a pattern he has apparently superimposed from *Gilgamesh*, thereby neglecting potentially significant differences among his examples. Thus, he is not prepared to deal with potentially significant differences among his examples.

Revising the Draft Using 10 on 1 and Difference within Similarity

How might the writer make better use of the evidence he has collected, using the principle of looking for difference within similarity?

Revision Strategy 1. Assume that the essay's answer—its conclusion about the evidence—does not yet go far enough. Rather than having to throw out his thinking, the writer should consider, as is almost always the case in revision, that he hasn't refined his initial idea enough. As an interpretation of the evidence, it leaves too much unaccounted for.

surviving pairs reveal is that the flood stories are not only descriptions of the end of a world but also creation accounts because they also tell us how a new civilization, the existing one, got started.

Revision Strategy 6. *Look for difference within similarity to better focus the thesis.* Given the recurrence of the survival pairs in the three stories, where might the writer locate a significant difference? One potentially significant difference involves the survival pair in the story of Gilgamesh, who are segregated from the new world and granted immortality. Perhaps this separation suggests that the new civilization will not be haunted by the painful memory of a higher power's intervention, leaving humans less fearful of what might happen in the future. This distinction could focus the argument in the essay; it does not distract from the writer's overall generalization but rather develops it.

Revision Strategy 7. *Constellate the evidence to experiment with alternative thesis options.* Notice how the hypothetical revision we've been producing has made use of looking for difference within similarity to explore alternative ways of connecting the evidence—a selected set of zooms—into an overall explanation. We call this activity constellating the evidence: like the imaginary lines that connect real stars into a recognizable shape, your thinking configures the examples into some larger meaning. In this case, instead of repeatedly concluding that the gods destroy humans when humans fail to make them happy, the writer might be on his way to a thesis about the relative optimism or skepticism of the way the flood stories represent change.

- Possible thesis #1: The flood stories propose the view that real change is necessarily apocalyptic rather than evolutionary.
- Possible thesis #2: The flood stories present qualified optimism about the possibility of new starts.

Try this 8.3: Describing Evidence

Have a conversation with yourself (on paper) about some piece of evidence you are studying. Start with the question we proposed for the student writer of the flood stories essay: What can be said with some certainty about this evidence? What, in other words, is clearly true of the data? What can be reported as fact without going on to interpretation of the facts?

This distinction between fact and interpretation can be a tricky one, but it is also essential because if you can't keep your data separate from what you've begun to think about them, you risk losing sight of the data altogether. Press yourself to keep answering the same question—What can be said with some certainty about this evidence? or a variant of the question, such as What's clearly true of this evidence is . . .

You may find it helpful to do this exercise with a partner or in a small group. If you work in a small group, have one member record the results as these emerge. You might also try this exercise as a freewrite and then share your results with others by reading aloud your list of facts or putting them on a blackboard along with other people's results. Once you've assembled a list of what can fairly be stated as fact about your

Revision Strategy 2. *Find a "1" to use with 10 on 1—a piece of the evidence sufficiently revealing to be analyzed in more detail; then zoom in on it.* In the case of the writer of "Flood Stories," that 1 might be a single story, which he could examine in more detail. He could then test his claims about this story through comparison and contrast with the other stories. In the existing draft, the writer has not used comparison and contrast to refine his conclusion; he has just imposed the same conclusion on other stories. Alternatively, the 1 might be the single most interesting feature that the three stories share.

Revision Strategy 3. *To find the most revealing piece or feature of the evidence, keep asking: What can be said with some certainty about the evidence? This question induces a writer to rehearse the facts to keep them fresh so that his or her first impressions don't "contaminate" or distort consideration of subsequent evidence.*

If the writer were to apply these strategies, he might have a conversation with himself that sounded something like this:

"What can I say with some certainty about my evidence?"

"In all three of these stories, a first civilization created by a god is destroyed by the same means—a flood."

Notice that this is a factual description of the evidence rather than a speculation about it. You are always better off to report the facts in your evidence carefully and fully before moving to conclusions. (This is harder to do than you might think.)

"What else is certain about the evidence?"

"In each case the gods leave a surviving pair to rebuild the civilization rather than just wiping everybody out and inventing a new kind of being. Interestingly, the gods begin again by choosing from the same stock that failed the first time around."

Mulling over the evidence in this way, taking care to lay out the facts and distinguish them from speculation, can help you decide what evidence to zoom in on. One of the chief advantages of zooms is that they get you in close enough to your evidence to see the questions its details imply.

Revision Strategy 4. *Examine the evidence closely enough to see what questions the details imply and what other patterns they reveal.* So far, the writer has worked mostly from two quite general questions: Why did the gods decide to wipe out their creations? And why do the gods need human beings? But there are other questions his evidence might prompt him to ask. In each story, for example, the gods are disappointed by humankind, yet they don't invent submissive robots who will dedicate their lives to making the deities feel good about themselves. Why not? This question might cause the writer to uncover a shared feature of his examples (a pattern) that he has thus far not considered—the surviving pairs.

Revision Strategy 5. *Uncover implications in your zoom that can develop your interpretation further.* Having selected the surviving pairs for more detailed examination, what might the writer conclude about them? One interesting fact that the

vidence, you are ready to start on some version of the question, What do these facts suggest? or What features of these data seem most to invite/require interpretation?

DOING 10 ON 1: A STUDENT PAPER (GOOD BYE LENIN!)

The following essay is an exploratory draft about a film, using a single scene to generate its thinking. As you read the essay, watch how the writer uses 10 on 1. Unlike “Flood Stories,” in which the writer felt compelled to make all of his evidence fit a narrow thesis, here the writer repeatedly tests her tentative conclusions against the evidence until she arrives at a plausible *working thesis* that might organize the next draft.

Think of the working thesis as an ultimate So what?—the product of other, smaller interpretive leaps along the way. As we did in Chapter 4 we have written in the So what? prompt where the writer has used it to move from observation to implication to conclusions. Notice how the writer allows her evidence to complicate and stimulate her thinking rather than just confirm (corroborate) her general idea.

On the Edge: A Scene from *Good Bye Lenin!*

- [1] The movie shows us Alex and Lara’s first date, which is to a sort of underground music club where the performers wear costumes made of plastic tubing and leather, and play loud hard-core rock music. At first, the musicians look surreal, as though they are part of a strange dream from which, at any moment, Alex will awake. The Western rock is real, though, as are the sci-fi costumes, and the scene moves forward to show Alex and Lara climbing a stairway out onto what looks like a fire escape and then through a window and into an apartment.
- [2] Here, Alex and Lara settle down into conversation. The young couple sits, hand in hand, and gazes together into the night sky; yet, as the camera pans away, we see that the apartment where the two have retreated is missing its façade. Inside, three walls are still decorated, complete with furniture, wallpaper, and even working lamps; yet, the two sit on the ledge of the fourth wall, which has crumbled away completely.
- [3] [So what?] On the surface, I think the movie invites us to read this as a visual representation of the new lives Alex, Lara, and the other characters face now that the wall has fallen. As a Westerner, at first I read this scene as a representation of the new relationship between Lara and Alex. In other words, I imagined the movie’s placement of the couple on the ledge of a domestic space as a representation of where their lives were going together—toward some shared domestic life, toward living together, toward becoming a family. I also thought this was a clever representation of the collapse of communism—this wall has also fallen down.
- [4] [Complicating evidence?] I don’t think, however, that the movie lets us entertain this one romanticized reading of the scene for long—the image is too frightening. As the camera pans away, we see that this isn’t a new Westernized apartment; this is an East German flat decorated in much the same way as Alex’s home was only months before. The image is alarming; the wall here has been ripped down, [So what?] and we are

forced to ask, did the fall of communism violently blow apart domestic and daily living of East German people?

- [5] The movie allows us this dichotomy and, I think, fights to sustain it. On one hand, Alex and Lara would not be on this date if the wall hadn’t come down, and yet the scene is more than just another representation of East Germany torn between Communism and the new Westernization. [Working thesis] The movie tries hard to remind us that the rapid Westernization of East Germany devastated while it liberated in other ways. This scene uses space to represent Alex and Lara’s (and East Germany’s) dilemma: Alex and Lara gaze out at the night sky but only because the wall has been blown apart. The exposed apartment is uninhabitable and yet the lights still work, the pictures are still hung, and a young couple leans against one another inside.

This draft is a really good example of a writer using evidence to complicate as well as support her claims. Her thinking evolves through successive complications; that is, she complicates a previous claim that was itself a complication. When the writer arrives at tentative answers, she tests them rather than just adding more evidence to prove that she is right.

Try this 8.4: Marking Claims, Evidence, and Complications in a Draft

As a check on the range of concepts that this and the previous chapter have introduced, mark the student draft as follows:

- *Mark claims*—assertions made about the evidence—with the letter C. Claims are ideas that the evidence seems to support. An example of a claim is in paragraph 4: “I don’t think, however, that the movie lets us entertain this one romanticized reading of the scene for long.”
- *Underline evidence*. The evidence is the pool of primary material (data)—details from the film, rather than the writer’s ideas about it. An example of evidence is in paragraph 2: “The young couple sits, hand in hand, and gazes together into the night sky; yet, as the camera pans away, we see that the apartment where the two have retreated is missing its façade.” This piece of evidence is the 1 of the 10 on 1. In effect, the whole draft goes after the range of possible implications that may be inferred from the image of the young couple sitting at the edge of an apartment that is missing one of its walls, presumably a result of war damage.
- *Circle complications*. Complications can be found both in the evidence a writer cites and in the claims a writer makes about it. Complicating evidence is evidence that does not fit the claims the writer has been making. For example, in paragraph 4: “As the camera pans away, we see that this isn’t a new Westernized apartment; this is an East German flat decorated in much the same way as Alex’s home was only months before. The image is alarming; the wall here has been ripped down.” This evidence causes the writer to reconsider an earlier claim from paragraph 3, that the scene is about the couple moving “toward some shared domestic life, toward living together, toward becoming a family.”

A TEMPLATE FOR ORGANIZING PAPERS USING 10 ON 1: AN ALTERNATIVE TO FIVE-PARAGRAPH FORM

Here is a template for writing papers using 10 on 1. It brings together much of the key terminology introduced in this chapter. Think of it not as a rigid format but as an outline for moving from one phase of your paper to the next. Unlike five-paragraph form, the template gives you room to think and to establish connections among your ideas.

1. In your introduction, start by noting (panning on) an interesting pattern or tendency you have found in your evidence. Explain what attracted you to it—why you find it potentially significant and worth looking at. This paragraph should end with a tentative theory (working thesis) about what this pattern or tendency might reveal or accomplish.
2. Zoom in on your representative example, some smaller part of the larger pattern and argue for the example's representativeness and usefulness in coming to a better understanding of your subject.
3. Do 10 on 1—analyze your representative example—sharing with your readers your observations (what you notice) and your tentative conclusions (answers to the So what? question). Then use complicating evidence to refine your claims.
- 4a. In a short paper you might at this point move to your conclusion, with its qualified, refined version of your thesis and brief commentary on what you've accomplished—that is, the ways in which your analysis has illuminated the larger subject.
- 4b. In a longer paper you would begin constellating—organizing the essay by exploring and elaborating the connections among your representative examples analyzed via 10 on 1. In the language of the film analogy, you would move from your initial zoom to another zoom on a similar case, to see the extent to which the thesis you evolved with your representative example needed further adjustment to better reflect the nature of your subject as a whole. This last move is a primary topic of our next chapter.

ASSIGNMENT: Writing a Paper Using 10 on 1

Write a paper in which you do 10 on 1 with a single representative example of something you are trying to think more carefully about. This could be a representative passage from a story or a representative story from a volume of stories by a single author. It could be a representative poem from a short volume of poetry or a representative passage from a nonfiction book or article. It could be a passage from a favorite columnist or a single representative song from a CD. It could be a single scene or moment or character from a film or play or other performance. It could be one picture or work of art that is representative of a larger exhibit.

Brainstorm your “1” on the page, making observations and asking So what? Draw out as much meaning as possible from your representative example. Go for depth. Then use this example as a lens for viewing similar examples. Use the template in the previous section as a model for organizing the paper.

CHAPTER 9

Making a Thesis Evolve

If you think of an essay as an act of thinking, then the evolutions of the thesis record the history of your various changes in thinking as you confronted evidence.

THIS CHAPTER IS AT THE HEART of what we have to say about essay writing, especially about the function of thesis statements. The chapter argues that even in a final draft a thesis develops through successive complications; it doesn't remain static, as people tend to believe. Your ability to discover ideas and improve on them in revision, as we've argued in the preceding chapters, depends largely on your attitude toward evidence—on your ability to use it as a means of testing and developing your ideas rather than just (statically) confirming and reasserting them.

This chapter is built around two extended examples. The first demonstrates the process of finding and testing the adequacy of a thesis in an exploratory draft. The second shows how a thesis evolves in a later-stage piece of writing. Both use the chapter's primary strategy, six steps for making a thesis evolve. Like the template for organizing papers using 10 on 1 offered at the end of the previous chapter, the six steps guide writers to confront complicating evidence and use it to refine their claims.

WHAT A STRONG THESIS DOES

By way of definition, the thesis of an analytical paper is an idea about your subject, a theory that explains what some feature or features of your subject mean.

A strong thesis comes from carefully examining and questioning your subject to arrive at some point about its meaning that would not have been immediately obvious to your readers.

A weak thesis either makes no claim or makes a claim that does not need proving, such as a statement of fact or an opinion with which virtually all of your readers would most likely agree before reading your paper (for example, “Exercise is good for you”).

There are two key concepts that this chapter will add to the discussions of evidence and thesis that occupy Chapters 7 and 8:

- First, a strong thesis evolves, or in the language of this chapter's title, it evolves. To say that a thesis evolves is to say that it changes as a paper progresses; it is progressively reformulated.
- Second, the changes in the thesis are galvanized by its repeated encounters with evidence. Like an inert (unreactive) material, a weak thesis neither affects nor is affected by the evidence that surrounds it. By contrast, in nearly all good writing the thesis evolves by gaining in complexity, and thus, in accuracy as the paper progresses.

Weak thesis statements (poorly formulated and inadequately developed) are most easily detected not only by their repetitiveness, but by their predictability. The writer says the same thing again and again, drawing the same overgeneralized conclusion from each piece of evidence ("and so, once again we see that . . ."). As the discussion of the 1 on 10 approach to evidence in Chapter 8 illustrates, a thesis that functions as an inert formula closes down a writer's thinking rather than guiding and stimulating it.

Even in cases in which, in the practice of particular academic disciplines, the thesis itself cannot change, there is still movement between the beginning of the paper and the end. In the report format of the natural and social sciences, for example, the hypothesis as initially worded must be either confirmed or denied, but it still undergoes much conceptual development. Rather than simply being confirmed or rejected, its adequacy is considered from various angles, and alternatives are often proposed, along with alternative methodologies for testing the original hypothesis again.

The first step in finding a thesis is to recognize that one will not appear to you ready-made in the material you are analyzing. In other words, summarizing may help you to find an analytical thesis, but a restatement of some idea that is already clearly stated in your subject is not itself a thesis. The process of finding a thesis—an idea about the facts and ideas in your subject—begins only when you start to ask questions about the material, deliberately looking for a place where you detect some kind of problem to be solved.

Once you begin to ask questions, the evidence typically points in more than one direction. More often than not, when inexperienced writers face a situation in which evidence seems to be unclear or contradictory, they tend to make one of two unproductive moves: they either ignore the conflicting evidence, or they abandon the problem altogether and look for something more clear-cut to write about. Faced with evidence that complicates your thesis, the one thing not to do is run away. The complications you've encountered are an *opportunity* to make your thesis evolve, as the following example shows.

MAKING A THESIS EVOLVE: A BRIEF EXAMPLE (TAX LAWS)

The savvy writer actively seeks out complicating evidence, taking advantage of chances to bring out complications to make the thesis more fully responsive to evidence. Let's revisit a sample thesis from Chapter 5, "tax laws benefit the wealthy." If you were to seek out data that would complicate this overstated claim, you would soon encounter

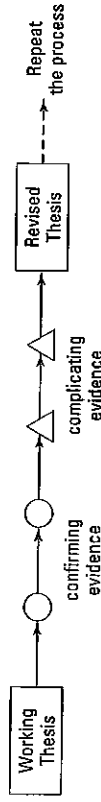


FIGURE 9.1

Evolving Thesis Diagram. A strong thesis evolves as it confronts and assimilates evidence; the evolved thesis may expand or restrict the original claim. The process may need to be repeated a number of times.

evidence that would press you to make some distinctions that the initial formulation of this claim leaves obscure. You would need, for example, to distinguish different sources of wealth and then to determine whether all or just some wealthy taxpayers are benefited by tax laws.

Do people whose wealth comes primarily from investments benefit less (or more) than those whose wealth comes from high wages? Evidence might also lead you to consider whether tax laws, by benefiting the wealthy, also benefit other people indirectly. Both of these considerations would necessitate some reformulation of the thesis. By the end of the paper, the claim that tax laws benefit the wealthy would have evolved into a more carefully defined and qualified statement that would reflect the thinking you have done in your analysis of evidence. This, by and large, is what good concluding paragraphs do—they reflect back on and reformulate your paper's initial position in light of the thinking you have done about it. (See Figure 9.1.)

But, you might ask, isn't this reformulating of the thesis something a writer does before he or she writes the essay? Certainly some of it is accomplished in the early exploratory writing and note-taking stage. But your finished paper will necessarily do more than list conclusions. Your revision process will have weeded out various false starts and dead ends that you may have wandered into on the way to your finished ideas, but the main routes of your movement from a tentative idea to a refined and substantiated theory should remain visible for readers to follow. To an extent, all good writing reenacts the chains of thought that led you to your conclusions. (See the section Locating the Evolving Thesis in the Final Draft later in this chapter for further discussion of how much thesis evolution to include in your final draft.)

Try this 9.1: Qualifying Overstated Claims

Making a thesis evolve makes that thesis more accurate. To do so is almost always to qualify (limit) the claim. Using the model of inquiry in the treatment of the example "Tax laws benefit the wealthy," seek out complications in one of the overstated claims in the following list. These complications might include conflicting evidence (which you should specify) and questions about the meaning or appropriateness of key terms (which you should articulate). Illustrate a few of these complications and then reformulate the claim in language that is more carefully qualified and accurate.

Welfare encourages recipients not to work.

People who are religious are more moral than those who are not.

Herbal remedies are better than pharmaceutical ones.

The book is always better than the film.

Women are more sensitive than men.

We learn from the lessons of history.

THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESIS AND EVIDENCE: THE THESIS AS LENS

What we have said so far about the thesis does not mean that all repetition of ideas in an essay is bad or that a writer's concluding paragraph should have no reference to the way the paper began. One function of the thesis is to provide the connective tissue, so to speak, that holds together a paper's three main parts—beginning, middle, and end. Periodic reminders of your paper's thesis, its unifying idea, are essential for keeping both you and your readers on track.

As we've also argued, though, developing an idea requires more than repetition. It is in light of this fact that the analogy of thesis to connective tissue proves inadequate. A better way of envisioning how a thesis operates is to think of it as a camera lens. This analogy more accurately describes the relationship between the thesis and the subject it seeks to explain. Although the lens affects how we see the subject (which evidence we select, which questions we ask about that evidence), the subject we are looking at also affects how we adjust the lens.

Here is the principle that the camera lens analogy allows us to see: the relationship between thesis and subject is *reciprocal*. In good analytical writing, especially in the early, investigatory stages of writing and thinking, the thesis not only directs the writer's way of looking at evidence; the analysis of evidence should also direct and redirect (bring about revision of) the thesis. Even in a final draft, writers are usually fine-tuning their governing idea in response to their analysis of evidence. (See Figure 9.2.)

The enemy of good analytical writing is the fuzzy lens—imprecisely worded thesis statements. Very broad thesis statements, those that are made up of imprecise (fuzzy) terms, make bad camera lenses. They blur everything together and muddy important distinctions. If your lens is insufficiently focused, you are not likely to see much in your evidence. If you say, for example, that the economic situation today is bad, you will at least have some sense of direction, but the imprecise terms bad and economic situation don't provide you with a focus clear enough to distinguish significant detail in your evidence. Without significant detail to analyze, you can't develop your thesis,

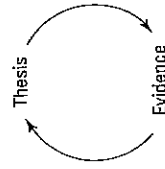


FIGURE 9.2
The Reciprocal Relationship between Thesis and Evidence Like a lens, the thesis affects the way a writer sees evidence. Evidence should also require the writer to readjust the lens.

either by showing readers what the thesis is good for (what it allows us to understand and explain) or by clarifying its terms.

A writer's thesis is usually fuzzier in a paper's opening than it is in the conclusion. As we argued in our critique of five-paragraph form in Chapter 8, a paper ending with a claim worded almost exactly as it was in the beginning has not made its thesis adequately responsive to evidence. The body of the paper should not only substantiate the thesis by demonstrating its value in selecting and explaining evidence, but also bring the opening version of the thesis into better focus.

WHAT A GOOD THESIS STATEMENT LOOKS LIKE

One of the best and most common ways of bringing the thesis into focus is by pitting one possible point of view against another. Good ideas usually take place with the aid of some kind of back pressure, by which we mean that the idea takes shape by pushing against (so to speak) another way of seeing things. This is not the same as setting out to overturn and completely refute one idea in favor of another. In good thesis statements both ideas have some validity, but the forward momentum of the thesis comes from playing the preferred idea off the other one.

Look at the following two thesis statements, both taken from published essays.

- It may not seem like it, but "Nice Pants" is as radical a campaign as the original Dockers series.
- If opponents of cosmetic surgery are too quick to dismiss those who claim great psychological benefits, supporters are far too willing to dismiss those who raise concerns. Cosmetic surgery might make individual people happier, but in the aggregate it makes life worse for everyone.

Notice that there is tension in each, which results from the defining pressure of one idea against another potentially viable idea. In the first thesis sentence, for example, the primary idea is that the new advertising campaign for Dockers trousers is radical. The back pressure against which this idea takes shape is that this new campaign may not seem radical. The writer will demonstrate the truth of both of these claims, rather than overturning one and then championing the other.

The same can be said of the parts of the second thesis statement. One part of the thesis makes claims for the benefits of cosmetic surgery. The forward momentum of the thesis statement comes from the back pressure of this idea against the idea that cosmetic surgery will also make life worse for everyone. Notice that the thesis statement does not simply say, "Cosmetic surgery is bad." The writer's job is to demonstrate that the potential harm of cosmetic surgery outweighs the benefits, but the benefits won't be just summarily dismissed. Both of the two ideas are to some extent true. Neither idea, in other words, is "a straw man"—the somewhat deceptive argumentative practice of setting up a dummy position solely because it is easy to knock down. A straw man does not strengthen a thesis statement because it fails to provide genuine back pressure.

One final note: the tension between ideas in a thesis statement is frequently present as well in the sentence structure. You can more or less guarantee this necessary

tension by starting your thesis statement with the word *although* or with the phrase “While it seems that” or with the “yes, but” or “if X, nonetheless Y” formulation.

■ Try this 9.2: Spotting the Tension in Good Thesis Statements

Find the tension in each of the following thesis statements. Decide which of the ideas is primary—the one you think the writer plans to support. Then locate the claim or claims in the thesis against which this primary claim will take shape.

1. Emphasis on the self in the history of modern thought may be an exaggeration, but the consequences of this vision of a self set apart have surely been felt in every field of inquiry.
2. We may join with the modern builders in justifying the violence of means—the sculptor’s hammer and chisel—by appealing to ends that serve the greater good. Yet too often modern planners and engineers would justify the creative destruction of habitat as necessary for doubtful utopias.
3. The derogation of middlebrow, in short, has gone much too far. It’s time to bring middlebrow out of its cultural closet, to hail its emollient properties, to trumpet its mending virtues. For middlebrow not only entertains, it educates—pleasurably training us to appreciate high art.

SIX STEPS FOR MAKING A THESIS EVOLVE

This is the central strategy of this chapter—a procedure not only for evolving a thesis but for shaping a draft. The remainder of the chapter offers two extended examples that apply the six steps. The first of these focuses on using the steps to find a thesis in an exploratory draft; the second focuses on how the thesis evolves as it encounters complicating evidence in a later draft. In both examples, you can see how the six steps build on the template for organizing papers using 10 on 1 that was offered at the end of Chapter 8. Both procedures use complicating evidence to refine claims. The template emphasizes moving to and from the analysis of a single representative example; the six steps offer a way of repeatedly testing the match between thesis and evidence. The former emphasizes evidence, the latter, thesis.

Here are the steps:

1. Formulate an idea about your subject. This working thesis should be some claim about the meaning of your evidence that is good enough to get you started.
2. See how far you can make this thesis go in accounting for evidence. Use the thesis to explain as much of your evidence as it reasonably can. Try it on.
3. Locate evidence that is not adequately accounted for by the thesis. You will need to look actively for such evidence because the initial version of the thesis will incline you to see only what fits and not to notice the evidence that doesn’t fit.
4. Make explicit the apparent mismatch between the thesis and selected evidence. Explain how and why some pieces of evidence do not fit the thesis.
5. Reshape your claim to accommodate the evidence that hasn’t fit. This will mean rewording your thesis to resolve or explain apparent contradictions.

6. Repeat steps 2, 3, 4, and 5 several times, until you are satisfied that the thesis statement accounts for your evidence as fully and accurately as possible. This is to say that the procedure for making a thesis evolve is recursive: it requires you to go over the same ground repeatedly, formulating successive versions of the thesis that are increasingly accurate in wording and idea.

As an overarching guideline, *acknowledge the questions that each new formulation of the thesis prompts you to ask*. The thesis develops through successive complications. Allowing your thesis to run up against potentially conflicting evidence (“but what about this?”) enables you to build upon your initial idea, extending the range of evidence it can accurately account for by clarifying and qualifying its key terms.

EVOLVING A THESIS IN AN EXPLORATORY DRAFT: A STUDENT DRAFT ON LAS MENINAS

The example is a student writer’s exploratory draft on a painting called *Las Meninas* (Spanish for “the ladies-in-waiting”) by the seventeenth-century painter Diego Velázquez. We have, by the way, selected a paper on a painting because all of the student’s data (the painting) is on one page where you can keep referring back to it, trying to share in the writer’s thought process. The method of analysis used here will, however, work with anything, print or nonprint.

Look at the painting in Figure 9.3, and then read the student’s draft. As you read, you will notice that much of the essay consists of list-like description, which leaves it somewhat unfocused. But careful description is a necessary stage in moving toward interpretations of evidence, especially in an exploratory draft in which the writer is not yet committed to any single position. Notice how the writer’s word choice in her descriptions prompts various kinds of interpretive leaps. We have added in brackets our observations about how the writer’s thinking is proceeding, and we have used underlining to track her various attempts at formulating a thesis.

As should be clear, we have incorporated into the six steps several of the observation and interpretation strategies from Unit 1, especially Notice and Focus, The Method, Interesting and Strange from Chapter 3, A Toolkit or Analytical Methods; and So what? from Chapter 4, Interpretation: What It Is, What It Isn’t, and How to Do It.

Velázquez’s Intentions in *Las Meninas*

- [1] Velázquez has been noted as being one of the best Spanish artists of all time. It seems that as Velázquez got older, his paintings became better. Toward the end of his life, he painted his masterpiece, *Las Meninas*. Out of all his works, *Las Meninas* is the only known self-portrait of Velázquez. There is much to be said about *Las Meninas*. The painting is very complex, but some of the intentions that Velázquez had in painting *Las Meninas* are very clear. [The writer opens with background information and a broad working thesis (underlined).]